THE

AERONAUT.

No. 154. March 25. 1818

The writers of ancient and later times have given to the world so many of the ebullitions of their fancy, and amused us with so many fascinating dreams, and visionary theories, that tired nature seems to sicken at the continuation of them, in the enlightened era of modern intellect. All those [imaginary

scenes of human life, which in former days could furnish the poet with images, and the moralist with ideas, have been dragged upon the page so often, that their appearance can no longer command that indulgence which their novelty once indispensably claimed. So totally discarded is the introduction of these exhausted subjects into the prose or verse of the times in which we live, that he who should even in this respect, would be upon a level with the epic versifier, who should fill the mouth of a dying hero of modern date with the praises of the deities of the ancient world, or the lyrist who should invoke to the inspiration of his song, the muses of Helicon, and the gods of Parnassus.

There was a time, when every thing which the princes of ancient composition had introduced into public notice, was imitated by all, from a kind of vener-

tion for the authority of those mas-
ter minds, which first travelled in
the path to intellectual fame. This
faithful reverence of preceding ge-
nius, produced at that period a ben-
eficial effect, in directing mankind
from the imperfection of copies to
the contemplation of the great
originals; in familiarising to
their understandings the beauties
to which they were comparative
strangers, and exalting the digni-
ty of ancient worth in the eyes
of the men of later days. But
as the end proposed has been
effectually answered, and the
cultivation of the knowledge of
those who swayed the sceptre
of mind in the times of old, is
no longer a thing neglected; we
became averse to the study of
that production, whatever it be,
that marches with servile steps
in the track marked out for ma-
ny centuries before, and pursued
by so many followers after. As

the nature and condition of the times fluctuate and change, it is of course necessary to accommodate the subjects of writing, under whatever denomination, to the manners, habits, sentiments, and aspect of the world, as they continually advance into general importance.

The themes of poetical, rather than of prosaic composition, will betray at all times the fault of too close a transcript of the ancient models. The subjects which can properly be discussed in verse, are so limited in number; the imagery in which the ideas are to be clothed, must necessarily be of so beautiful a form; and so much space must be afforded in which the imagination may wander at liberty in excursive flights; that the poet will often resort, from necessity, to the choice of those

figures, which the ancients drew from their own vague and indefinite ideas of human life. Turning with disgust from the bold and well-known scenes of modern times, they call up those imaginary pleasures which served to amuse the fancies of the bards of earlier days. But they do not recollect, that the theories which might sooth the men of that remoter period, can now have no influence upon us, who have found them by experience to be but the empty vapors of a vain imagination, and not professing a substantial form, or a real existence.

Those who have most flagrantly erred in this particular, and whose transgressions meet of necessity with most aversion, from all who have perception to discern,

or judgment to decide; are they who have, in sickly pastorals, turned the modern clown into the tender shepherd, and clothed the barbarity of the rustic peasant, in the airy garb of imaginary refinement. At that early age of the world, in which the pleasures of rural existence found so many admirers, and such unqualifying defenders, the interchange of commercial intercourse, and the introduction of sordid gain, had not so corrupted the simplicity of the country swain, as they have effected in our time. But, with all this, the rustics of old had neither so much innocence, nor so little guile, as the poets wished to give them. Nevertheless, there was then

some scope for fancy, and some room for eulogium; because nothing certain or settled had been ascertained: but to attempt, in the face of the most positive evidence, and the plainest truth to the contrary, to confer upon the peasants now a character which even so long before us was not manifestly their due, is to throw a veil of darkness and shade over the shining brightness of the present age. Mankind are not so dim in intellectual vision as not to be able to see the false and faithless colors, in which a few would present the unlettered woodman to the public gaze, as clothed in the robe of spotless purity, and the mantle of undefiled virtue.

to suppose the pastoral life at present to be one of undisturbed enjoyment, and of little care, is to subvert the plainest usages of civil society. For, granting that anciently the husbandman enjoyed so tranquil an existence, which it has been clearly proved was never the case, that course of things cannot now continue, because the profession of property, and the preservation of wealth, are in themselves a perpetual source of bodily labor, and mental toil: and he who resolved to settle down in sluggish inaction, that he might find time to be happy, would soon find the very means of subsistence wrested from his grasp.

Since, therefore, all opportunity of making the pastoral kind of poetry interesting with any appearance of

truth, is entirely cut away, it is much better for it to be left untouched. We cannot find any thing in the shepherd, as he watches his flocks either on our Western hills, or on the plains of foreign climes, either to excite our envy, or call forth our love: for like others he is the slave of passion and vice, without knowledge to ~~smooth~~ soften, or refinement to soften, the roughness of his native mould. And as the portrait of rural life in former times, granting its truth at those periods, has nothing similar to that of our era, two consequences inevitably ensue when a writer of this style; either that he will offend by his coarseness, or disgust with his imitation.

It cannot be thought, of course, that he has much

room for the exercise of his inventive powers, who governs himself exactly by what others have done before him, or employs himself on a theme which will not admit of poetical embellishment. To add dignity to virtue, and honor to worth; to paint the beauties and ~~well as~~ unfold the magnificence of Nature; and draw out into useful exercise that splendor of language by which man may be depicted as he is; is the province of poetry, and the labor of the poet. In descanting with tiresome prodicity on scenes which never have existed, however captivating to the mind, and desirable to the heart; no end is produced, and no benefit effected. As the

language of verse has the
power, if well arranged,
of insensibly conducting the heart by
soothing measures through
each changing variety of its
course, he who combines
not the utility of instruc-
tion with the charms of
pleasure, loses that oppor-
tunity which he might
otherwise enjoy, of conveying
the precepts of solid truth,
in the enchanting form
of melodious minstrelsy.
But this is in effect to
say, that a majority
of those who have tun-
ed their lyres, for ages
in succession, have but
struck a few enrapture-
ing notes, which charm-
ed for a moment, when
recommended by their

novelty, and then ceased to interest the imagination, and engage the heart.

A.